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SUBJECT: CHINESE VISIT ALBANIA

Classified By: DCM Deborah A. Jones, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) On October 29-31, Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Dejiang visited Tirana and met with Prime Minister Sali Berisha, President Bamir Topi, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ilir Meta, Speaker of Parliament Jozefina Topalli, and participated in economic related events. According to Armand Skati, Director of the Asia Department at the MFA, the visit had two goals: to commemorate 60 years of Albanian-Chinese diplomatic relations and to create "a new path forward." To this end, the two sides signed six agreements, three between the governments and three between private firms. The Chinese government also reportedly gave the GOA a no strings attached "grant" of approximately USD 1.6 million.

¶2. (C) Skati said that China and Albania share many of the same "global views", and the two sides hope to coordinate more in the future in international fora such as the United Nations. Skati said that the Chinese were "keen to discuss Taiwan" and said the GOA emphasized its support for the "one China" policy in meetings and in public statements during the visit. The agreements signed include MOUs with the Ministries of Trade, Economy, and Education as well as private agreements between Chinese and Albanian companies. These latter agreements include an agreement between cellular phone companies, one with Albtelecom, and another for the supply of chromium to China, perhaps 100,000 tons per year according to Skati. Skati said China is mainly interested in mineral resources from Albania. Skati said no mention was made of the former Guantanamo detainee Uighurs who currently live in Albania. (Note: The Chinese have made their displeasure clear for the GOA's acceptance of the Uighurs and, for its part, the GOA has said publicly and privately that it will not accept any more Uighur detainees from Guantanamo Bay. End note.)

¶3. (C) Comment: Albanian-Chinese relations have a complicated history, with the disagreement over Albania's acceptance of Uighur detainees from Guantanamo Bay being the most recent rough patch. This latest visit, coming after PM Berisha's visit to China in April 2009, seemed largely ceremonial in nature with a side emphasis on economic ties. Dr. Albert Rakipi of the Institute for Strategic and International Studies privately characterized the visit as "routine" and said an MFA contact told him that relations

between China and Albania "are not taken seriously."

WITHERS